THE TRUTH ABOUT KIDS & GUNS

How 2,703 children and teens lost their lives to guns
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The Truth About Kids & Guns

Based on the most recent available data, in 2011 there were 2,703 child and teenage firearm deaths in America. That’s seven of America’s youth killed every day. These youth were shot in different ways by varying intents—some were murdered, some unintentionally shot themselves or were unintentionally shot by another, and others died by their own hand. All were tragic and should lead to public outcry about the continuous threat gun violence poses to our nation’s youth.

This report provides a detailed breakdown of data on children and guns, including 2011 fatal injury, nonfatal injury, and violent death data, as well as other relevant studies. We analyzed the 2,703 youth firearm deaths and 16,700 youth firearm injuries, detailing trends, as well as where and how these shootings occurred.

This is a public health crisis. These deaths are preventable. Most parents bring a gun into the home legally with no intent of doing harm. Many think they’re doing their family a service by offering protection. Yet it is these guns that cause the majority of gun deaths and injuries. A gun in the home is a significant risk factor for homicide, suicide, and unintentional shootings. The firearm is much more likely to harm a family member, such as a child or teen, than to help prevent or deter a crime. Ultimately, where there are more guns, there are more gun deaths.

We at Brady are working hard to reduce gun death and injury. The first step toward solving this public health crisis is understanding the problem—where, how, and why these deaths and injuries occur. This report provides that overview.

I have met many families who have lost a son or daughter to gun violence. Some of these parents sent their children over to a friend’s house to play, only for them to never return. Some of these parents’ children were murdered due to senseless gun violence. Others live with the knowledge that their children ultimately took their lives with a gun they kept in their home for protection or hunting. The death of a child is tragic, a grief no parent should have to live with, and a grief no parent can ever truly forget. Read this report, spread the word, and let’s work together to make this the safer nation we all want and deserve.

Sincerely,

Dan Gross
President
Brady Center & Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

“This is a public health crisis. These deaths are preventable.”
A NOTE ABOUT DATA SOURCES

This report contains data on youth gun deaths and injuries, as well as youth access to firearms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) fatal injury data, nonfatal injury data, and violent death data are included, as well as data from relevant studies.

There are three sources within the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control that provide relevant information about gun death and injury to children:

**Fatal data**—“Death data come from a national mortality database compiled by CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics. This database contains information from death certificates filed in state vital-statistics offices and includes causes of death reported by attending physicians, medical examiners, and coroners. It also includes demographic information about decedents reported by funeral directors, who obtain that information from family members and other informants. Population data come from the Bureau of the Census.”\(^1\) At the time of this report’s publication, 2011 is the most current death data available.

**Nonfatal data**—The “Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Nonfatal provides data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System —All Injury Program (NEISS-AIP). This data is intended for a broad audience—the public, the media, public health practitioners and researchers, and public health officials—to increase their knowledge of nonfatal injury. The NEISS-AIP data provides information about what types of nonfatal injuries occur in U.S. hospital emergency departments, how common they are, who they affect, and what causes them.”\(^2\) The data is then weighted based on population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. 2013 is the most current data available. 2011 data has been analyzed to ensure a complete data set (both fatal and nonfatal data).

**Violent death data**—“The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) provides states and communities with a clearer understanding of violent deaths to guide local decisions about efforts to prevent violence and track progress over time. NVDRS is the only state-based surveillance (reporting) system that pools data on violent deaths from multiple sources into a usable, anonymous database. These sources include state and local medical examiner, coroner, law enforcement, crime lab, and vital statistics records.”\(^3\) Violent death data for 2011 was provided for 17 NVDRS states and, therefore, is not nationally representative.

The CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's data is the most reliable, as the Center is the nation’s leading authority on violence and injury, and tasked with providing accurate information to help prevent violence and injuries. Although it lags behind by more than a year, the CDC’s data was analyzed rather than media accounts since many firearm fatalities, particularly suicides and unintentional shootings, do not receive media coverage. This can lead to underreporting. Furthermore, certain geographic media outlets may report on firearm fatalities more than others.

This report also includes several studies and publications related to children and gun violence. These studies have varying methodologies, which can result in some limitations to the data. However, the studies were selected because they present important, accurate information about children and guns.
SUMMARY OF VITAL STATISTICS

IN 2011...

19,403 CHILDREN AND TEENS WERE SHOT

2,703 CHILDREN AND TEENS WERE KILLED BY FIREARMS

2ND FIREARMS WERE THE SECOND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR YOUTH AGES 1-19
The United States is home to approximately 300 million guns\textsuperscript{1,2}, and the accessibility of these guns has a devastating impact on children.

Each year, the massive toll continues to rise. In 2011 alone, nearly 20,000 children and youth under the age of 20 were killed or injured by firearms. That means an average of 53 young people were shot every day—two every hour.\textsuperscript{3}

Firearms are one of the leading causes of death among children and teens, and kill more kids than cancer and heart disease. In 2011, 2,703 young people, ages 0-19, were killed by gunfire in the United States. More than half of these deaths, 61% (1,651), were homicides, 32% (850) were suicides, and 5% (140) were caused by unintentional gunfire (see Figure 1). Approximately 16,700 more youth suffered nonfatal injuries, many of which resulted in serious lifelong consequences.\textsuperscript{4}

The firearm mortality rate among children and teens under the age of 20 increased slightly in 2011 to 3.17 deaths per 100,000 population, up from 3.13 in 2010.\textsuperscript{5} Still, the gun death rate is strikingly lower than in 1993, when U.S. gun violence was at its recorded peak. That year, annual gun deaths among youth reached 5,751, with a corresponding rate of 8.19.\textsuperscript{6}
Rates fell sharply throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the pace of decline has since slowed, and over the past decade, the gun death rate among children and teens has remained relatively unchanged (Figure 2). The firearm homicide rate among children and teens (0-19) has followed a similar pattern, decreasing 63% since its 1993 peak (5.16 and 1.93, respectively). Despite a slower downward trend in recent years, the rate in 2011 was 1.93, the lowest in twenty-six years. In contrast, the rate of suicide by firearm increased among youth ages 0-19 in 2011. Although there have been modest decreases over the past decade, firearm suicide rates rose 15% in 2011, from 0.86 to 0.99. The rate of unintentional gun deaths (0-19) also showed a slight increase in 2011, rising from 0.16 to 0.17 (Figure 2).

There has been progress, but gun violence remains unacceptably high among America’s youth. Figure 3 charts the leading causes of death among youth ages 1-19, and provides a revealing look at the impact of guns on these young lives.
• As Figure 3 shows, compared to many other causes of death, the number of firearm-related deaths among children and teens is disproportionately high. In 2011, firearm-related injuries were the second most common cause of death for children and teens ages 1-19.

• Homicide was the second leading cause of death among children and teens in 2011, as shown in Figure 3. Firearms were used in 1,644 youth homicides (1-19) or roughly 69% (see Figures 3 and 4).

• As Figure 3 shows, suicide ranked as the third leading cause of death among youth ages 1-19 in 2011. And, of the 2,089 youth (1-19) who died by suicide, 850 or 41% used a firearm (see Figures 3 and 4). However, suicide had the greatest impact on youth ages 10-19. (There were only 5 recorded suicide deaths under the age of 10 in 2011.) In 2011, suicide was the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-19.
Despite occurring less frequently, unintentional gun deaths have a disparate impact on young people. In 2011, 24% of all unintentional gun deaths occurred among youth under age 20. As Figure 5 shows, unintentional firearm deaths make up a significant share of total firearm-related deaths for children and youth—especially when compared to older populations. Thirty-four percent of gun deaths among children under age 5 were unintentional, compared with less than 2% of adults ages 20 and over. And the impact could even be higher than records show. Evidence suggests that unintentional gun deaths are routinely undercounted among children. This finding can have important implications for prevention.

In 2011, only motor vehicle accidents were responsible for more deaths (4,297) than guns among children and teens. However, if current trends continue, gun deaths are likely to exceed deaths from car accidents. Over the past decades, a concerted effort has succeeded in dramatically reducing traffic fatalities.

The same can be done for gun violence. If the disastrous consequences on children, families, and entire communities are to be curtailed, gun violence prevention should be given the same attention and scale of resources as that of other prominent health issues, including motor vehicle accidents. Widespread access to guns and the subsequent lethal hazards warrant this focus.

**Figure 5: Unintentional firearm deaths as a percentage of overall gun deaths, by age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Firearm Deaths</th>
<th>Total Unintentional Firearm Deaths</th>
<th>Unintentional Firearm Deaths as a Percent of the Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population (0-85+)</td>
<td>32,346</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 0-4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 5-9</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>21.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 10-14</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 15-19</td>
<td>2,306</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-85+</td>
<td>29,643</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rates based on 20 or fewer deaths may be unstable.
Children of all ages, races, and genders are affected by gun violence. However, the risk of gun death and injury varies greatly among young people, with certain subgroups of the population bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. Following well-established trends, boys, older teens, and Black youth were all at particularly high risk for firearm death in 2011.¹

**Age**

Older teens are more likely to die from firearm-related injuries than younger age groups. As Figure 6 shows, a young person’s risk of being killed by a gun is highest between the ages of 15 and 19, based on five-year data. In 2011, 2,306 teens in this age group lost their lives to gunfire (10.65 per 100,000 population). Among 10-14 year olds, firearms were responsible for 238 deaths; for children ages 0-9, there were 159 gun deaths in 2011.²

This same pattern holds true for suicides and unintentional gun deaths, and is particularly pronounced for homicides. In 2011, the firearm suicide rate was 3.50 among 15-19 year olds and 0.44 for youth ages 10-14. The unintentional gun death rate for youth ages 15-19 was 0.30 in 2011. The second highest rate was among 10-14 year olds (0.14), followed closely by children ages 0-9 at 0.11.³

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**Figure 6: A youth’s risk of being killed by a gun, five-year data**
The firearm homicide rate was 6.62 for youth ages 15-19, compared with 0.52 for 10-14 year olds and 0.27 for children under age 10.³

**Gender**

Young males had consistently higher rates of firearm-related deaths than young females, and the disparities increased with age. For children ages 0-9, the firearm death rate for males was 1.6 times higher than that of females (0.48 and 0.30, respectively); for youth ages 10-14, the rate was 3.7 times higher among males (1.78 and 0.48, respectively); and, among 15-19 year olds, males were 7.3 times more likely than females to die of firearm-related injuries (18.36 and 2.52, respectively).⁴

As Figure 7 shows, gender differences were also found for both firearm homicide and suicide deaths in 2011. The firearm homicide rate for males under age 20 was 3.20, compared with 0.60 for females of the same population. Similarly, young males were more likely to die of firearm suicide than young females. The rate for males ages 10-19 was 3.39 in 2011, compared with 0.45 for females.⁵

**Race**

In 2011, the gun death rate was highest among Black children and teens (7.80), followed by American Indians/Alaska Natives (2.48), Whites (2.32), and Asians/Pacific Islanders (0.70). As shown in Figure 7, the firearm homicide rate was also highest for Black youth at 6.92. American Indians/Alaska Natives had the second highest rate (0.98), followed by Whites (0.95). The rate was lowest among Asians/Pacific Islanders at 0.43. In contrast, American Indians/Alaska Natives and Whites had the highest firearm suicide rates among youth 10-19 in 2011, at 2.32 and 2.26, respectively. Rates for other groups were 1.04 for Blacks and 0.52 for Asians/Pacific Islanders.⁶
Youth gun deaths happen all across the country, in every region and state, but one obvious trend emerges when analyzing these deaths: where there are more guns, there are more gun deaths.

Figures 8 and 9 show two maps of the United States. In Figure 8, each state is grouped based on five-year age-adjusted firearm mortality rates per 100,000 population (ages 0-19).\(^1\) Figure 9 shows states grouped by the percentage of adults with a household firearm. The percentages come from a 2005 study published in *Pediatrics* that detailed the estimated prevalence of household firearms.\(^2\)
On average, the states with the higher gun ownership rates have the higher rates of gun death, while the states with the lower gun ownership rates have the lower rates of gun death. Wyoming has the highest percentage of adults with household firearms, 62.8%, far above the national average of 32.6%. Wyoming also has one of the highest five-year youth firearm mortality rates with a rate of 5.18, far above the five-year national average of 3.29. At the low end of the spectrum, 11.3% of New Jersey adults have a household firearm; New Jersey’s five-year average youth firearm mortality rate was 2.14.

That more guns result in more gun deaths holds true across youth firearm deaths for all intents: homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings. Figure 10 shows the states with the highest firearm death rates for each intent. As seen in Figure 10, the states that top these lists—Louisiana (45.6%), Wyoming (62.8%), and Mississippi (54.3%)—all have a high percentage of adults with household firearms, far above the national average. States with lower percentages of adults with household firearms are largely absent (except for outliers Illinois and Maryland). From coast to coast, higher levels of gun ownership are a significant risk factor for all types of youth gun deaths.

### Figure 10: States with the highest five-year age-adjusted firearm death rates, 0-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intent</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentional</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rates based on 20 or fewer deaths may be unstable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of adults with household firearms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adolescents in big urban counties are just as likely to die by firearms as adolescents in small rural counties.

Figure 11 shows data from a study published in 2010 that compared adolescent firearm deaths for all U.S. counties, ranging from the most urban to the most rural. This data included all adolescent (ages 0-19) gun deaths from 1999 through 2006. The authors included a breakdown of firearm homicide, firearm suicide, and unintentional firearm crude death rates (per 100,000) for 10 county classifications. As Figure 11 shows, there is virtually no difference between the overall crude youth firearm death rates in the most urban counties (classification 0) when compared with the most rural counties (classification 9)—4.64 and 4.04, respectively.

It is only when looking specifically at the manner of death that variations across the rural-urban continuum are revealed. Adolescents in the most urban counties are at a much greater risk of firearm homicides than their counterparts in the most rural counties, 3.83 versus 0.78. The opposite is true for suicides and unintentional shootings, where adolescents in rural counties are at a much greater risk: 0.70 versus 2.75 for suicides and 0.11 versus 0.51 for unintentional shootings.
1.7 MILLION CHILDREN LIVE IN A HOME WITH AN UNLOCKED, LOADED GUN

76 PERCENT OF CHILDREN AGES 5-14 KNOW WHERE FIREARMS ARE KEPT IN THE HOME

87 PERCENT OF FIREARM DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER 10 TAKE PLACE IN A HOME

82 PERCENT OF FIREARM SUICIDES AMONG YOUTH UNDER 18 USED A FIREARM BELONGING TO A FAMILY MEMBER, USUALLY A PARENT
Where Youth Gun Deaths Occur

Children are exposed to gun violence at disturbingly high rates—at school, on street corners, in movie theaters, and shopping malls. Yet the place where guns pose the greatest risk to children is the home. Children are more likely to be killed by a gun in a home than anywhere else.

While there is no nationwide data on where firearm deaths occur, the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) is able to provide data from 17 states for 2011. Although incomplete, NVDRS data offers a better understanding of how and why these deaths occur and informs efforts aimed at prevention. In 2011, 60% of all youth gun deaths (0-19) occurred in an apartment or at a house. The next most common location was a street or highway (19%), followed by a motor vehicle, parking lot, or public garage (7%). As Figure 12 shows, this pattern held true for children of all ages. Among youth ages 15-19, 55% of gun deaths occurred in or around a home in 2011. The proportion was even greater for younger age groups. Eighty-seven percent of firearm-related deaths among children under age 10 took place in a home; 82% for youth ages 10-14.2

Figure 12: Firearm deaths by age and location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Home/Apartment/Driveway/Yard</th>
<th>All others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children are more likely to be killed by a gun in a home than anywhere else.
When homicides, suicides, and unintentional gun deaths are examined separately, further evidence of gun-related dangers in the home are revealed (see Figure 13). Unintentional shootings had the highest proportion of deaths occurring in the home, with 85% in 2011. Most of these deaths occurred when children were playing with a loaded gun. In the case of suicides among children and teens, eight out of ten (82%) took place in a home, with natural areas (e.g., countryside, forest) the next most common location (5%). For youth homicides, the percentage occurring at home dips to 43%—yet it is still the most common location for a child to be killed.³

**Figure 13: Youth killed in a home, by intent**

- 4 out of 10 firearm homicides take place in a home
- 8 out of 10 firearm suicides take place in a home
- 9 out of 10 unintentional shooting fatalities take place in a home
Names like Columbine and Sandy Hook have become etched in our collective memories. Although children die every day from gun violence, there is something especially horrible and shocking about these tragic acts. Schools are supposed to be safe havens where children can learn, grow, and achieve. Each new tragic event elicits national attention, around-the-clock media coverage, and a fresh examination of why they take place. Discussions focus on topics like bullying and mental illness. But there is another question which we frequently fail to address: where did the guns come from?

Studies have shown that the majority of guns used in school shootings came from the shooters’ home or from a friend or family member. A 2002 study by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, which looked at 37 targeted school shooting incidents, found that over two-thirds (68%) of the attackers had acquired the gun(s) from their own home or that of a relative. The Safe School Initiative was a collaborative effort by the two agencies to study school shootings and to determine what could be done to prevent future incidents. The examination demonstrated hardly any similarities amongst the attackers—aside from the origin of the weapons they used.

Figure 14: Selected school shootings from the Safe School Initiative where gun was taken from home

- **Heritage High School**
  - Location: Conyers, Georgia
  - Date: May 1999
  - Summary: Six students injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took guns from his home.

- **Westside Middle School**
  - Location: Jonesboro, Arkansas
  - Date: March 1998
  - Summary: One teacher and four students killed. Nine students and one teacher injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took guns from grandfather’s house.

- **Heath High School**
  - Location: West Paducah, Kentucky
  - Date: December 1997
  - Summary: Three students killed. Five students injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took guns from his parents, and from a friend’s home.

- **Bethel Regional High School**
  - Location: Bethel, Alaska
  - Date: February 1997
  - Summary: One student killed. School principal killed. 2 students injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took a shotgun from his home.
In addition, the study revealed that 61% of attackers used a handgun, 49% used a rifle or shotgun, and nearly half (46%) had more than one weapon with them at the time of the attack. The study also found that 59% of attackers had some experience with a gun prior to the attack.

Similarly, a study looking more broadly at school-associated violent deaths over a seven-year period (July 1, 1992 to June 30, 1999) found that 61% of the guns used could be traced back to either the perpetrator’s home or a friend or relative. It was determined that, of the 218 student perpetrators of school-associated homicide or suicide, 56% used a firearm. The vast majority of perpetrators were found to be male, with a median age of 16. Twenty-seven percent turned the gun on themselves, 69% committed a homicide, and 4% carried out a homicide-suicide. The majority of the guns used in both homicide and suicide came from either the perpetrator’s home or from a friend or family member—77% for suicide and 51% for homicide. The study also revealed that guns involved in multiple-victim incidents were more likely to have come from the home than those used in single-victim incidents.

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**Figure 15: Selected recent school shootings where gun was taken from home**

- **Reynolds High School**
  - Location: Troutdale, Oregon
  - Date: June 2014
  - Summary: One classmate killed. One teacher injured. Shooter took his own life.
  - Source of Gun: Took a rifle and a pistol from his home.

- **Berrendo Middle School**
  - Location: Roswell, New Mexico
  - Date: January 2014
  - Summary: Two students injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took a shotgun from his home.

- **Sparks Middle School**
  - Location: Sparks, Nevada
  - Date: October 2013
  - Summary: One teacher killed. Two students injured. Shooter took his own life.
  - Source of Gun: Took father’s pistol.

- **Taft Union High School**
  - Location: Taft, California
  - Date: January 2013
  - Summary: One classmate injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took his brother’s shotgun.

- **Chardon High School**
  - Location: Chardon, Ohio
  - Date: February 2012
  - Summary: Three students killed. Three students injured.
  - Source of Gun: Took his uncle’s pistol.

- **Millard South High School**
  - Location: Omaha, Nebraska
  - Date: January 2011
  - Summary: Assistant principal killed. Principal and school nurse injured. Shooter took his own life.
  - Source of Gun: Took father’s gun.
The real surprise, perhaps, is that these tragedies don’t occur more regularly. Studies have shown that weapon carrying is common among American youth and that many claim to have easy access to guns. The 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a nationally representative sample of students in grades nine through twelve, found that one in twenty high school students had carried a gun in the previous thirty days; 9% of boys and 2% of girls. Five percent of students reported carrying a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, on school property in the preceding thirty days. And over a million students reported being injured or threatened with a weapon on school property over the last year.

The ease with which young people are able to access guns is deeply troubling. In a 2002 nationally representative survey of adolescents in grades 7 through 12, 24% reported having easy access to a gun in the home. Among those, 63% declared the availability of a shotgun, followed by a rifle (61%), handgun (57%), or other gun (16%). Access to a gun was highest among adolescents who are White, who live with two parents, and who have a mother with at least a high school degree. It is also important to note that the perceived in-home availability of guns was only slightly lower than that of alcohol (24% and 29%, respectively). In a survey of 7th and 10th graders in inner city schools in Boston and Milwaukee, 42% reported they could get a gun if they wanted one. Seventeen percent of adolescents reported already having carried a concealed gun, the majority citing the need for protection or self-defense as their reasons. More recently, a study found that 17% of children and young people at risk for suicide say there’s a gun in their home.

If school shootings and other violent incidents at schools are to be stopped, the effort must begin at home. It starts with parents, who need to recognize the risks of guns in the home and who need to make safer choices about gun access and storage.

Over 1,000,000 high school students are injured or threatened each year with a weapon at school.
The majority of youth gun deaths take place in a home, or with a gun from the home, because so many youth live in homes where they have unsafe access to firearms.\(^1\)\(^2\)

Figure 16: Estimated percent of loaded and unlocked household firearms among adults with a child under 18; Estimated number of children (0-17) living with unlocked and loaded firearms

\% / No. = Estimated percent of loaded and unlocked household firearms among adults with a child under 18

No. = Estimated number of children (0-17) living with unlocked and loaded firearms
Nationwide, approximately 1.7 million youth live in a home with an unlocked, loaded gun.\(^5\)

A nationally representative study published in 2000 found that 43% of homes with children and firearms have at least 1 unlocked firearm in their home, and 9% have at least 1 unlocked and loaded firearm in their home.\(^4\) Furthermore, a 2006 study found that storage practices become more dangerous as children move into their adolescent years (ages 13-17), meaning firearms are more likely to be unlocked.\(^5\)

Not only do some parents store firearms unsafely, many also underestimate the knowledge their children have about firearms in the home. A study in 2002 conducted interviews with parents and children (ages 5-14) in homes with firearms (see Figure 17). The study found that 3 out of 4 (76%) of the children knew where these firearms were stored, but many of their parents didn’t realize this. Of the parents who reported that their child did not know the storage location of the household’s guns, 39% were contradicted by their child’s report.\(^6\)

If children come across a gun, they are likely to handle or play with it. In the same study, 1 out of 3 (36%) children indicated that they had handled the household gun.\(^7\)

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**Figure 17: Child knowledge and handling of guns in the home versus parental beliefs**

![Pie charts showing percentages of children and parents knowledge and handling of guns](chart.png)

- **76%** of children ages 5-14 know where firearms are kept in the home.
- **39%** of parents who reported that their children did not know the storage location of household guns were contradicted by their children’s reports.
- **36%** of children 5-14 have handled a household firearm.
- **22%** of parents who reported that their children had never handled a household gun were contradicted by their children’s reports.
In this instance, 22% of the parents who indicated that their child had never handled a household gun were contradicted by their child’s report. A separate Pediatrics study tracked what 64 boys between the ages of 8 and 12 (placed into 29 groups) did when they encountered a real gun. 76% of the groups handled the firearm and in 48% of the groups, one or more of the boys pulled the trigger. Even prior gun safety education had no helpful impact. Over 90% of the boys who handled the gun or pulled the trigger had previously received gun safety instruction. Kids are curious, and if they find a gun many cannot resist the temptation to handle or play with it.

It is clear that unsafe access to firearms in the home leads to youth gun deaths and injuries. A study of the National Violent Injury Statistics System (NVISS) looking at suicide data for a two-year period (2001-2002), found that in 82% of firearm suicides among youth (under 18), where the firearm owner was known, young people used a firearm belonging to a family member, usually a parent. When storage status was noted, about two-thirds of the firearms had been stored unlocked. A separate study found that in both suicide attempts and unintentional injuries involving youth (ages 0-19), more than 75% of the guns used came from the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Statement on Firearm Storage

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the absence of guns from children’s homes and communities is the most reliable and effective way to prevent firearm-related injuries in children and adolescents. However, for parents who choose to own firearms, safe gun storage (guns unloaded and locked, ammunition locked separately) can reduce unintentional injury and suicide risk for children and adolescents.
As these numbers illustrate, unsafe access to guns by children has tragic consequences. Even more tragic is the fact that many or most of these deaths or injuries could have been prevented. Legislation to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people is critical to reducing gun death and injury, but stronger laws alone are not sufficient to solve our nation’s gun violence problem. Most of the guns behind these tragedies are not purchased or owned with the intent of causing harm. They are a part of the 300 million guns already in homes across the country, guns that are owned for hunting, target shooting, collection, or protection.

A simple truth is that too many tragedies occur because proper weight has not been given to the risks that come with gun ownership. There is a cultural narrative that emphasizes the protective and recreational benefits of guns, while virtually ignoring the possible and very real dangers. Educating the public about the relative risks and benefits of gun ownership has the potential to change social norms without jeopardizing the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

Patterns of irresponsible behavior can be shifted. Public awareness and education campaigns have been successful in curtailing risky behavior in other areas, such as tobacco use and drunk driving (“Friends don’t let friends drive drunk.”), changing habits that were once considered not only acceptable but glamorous a generation ago. A similar approach can be successful in shifting dangerous attitudes and behaviors around guns.

To prevent gun deaths and injuries, education programs and campaigns can inspire law-abiding individuals to make safer choices around gun ownership and access. Two efforts to educate parents have already demonstrated success.

ASK (Asking Saves Kids)

The ASK Campaign was launched in 2000 in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics. ASK is based on the fact that more than one-third of homes with children have a gun, many stored unlocked or loaded. ASK inspires parents to begin asking if there are guns where their children play. Using mass media and grassroots efforts to make parents aware of the dangers associated with unsafely stored guns in other homes, the ASK Campaign attempts to spark a chain reaction of key attitude and behavior changes, including peer-to-peer intolerance of unsafe behavior. The goal is to encourage parents to store guns safely or remove them altogether, greatly diminishing or eliminating the possibility that those guns will cause an accident, murder, or suicide.

According to national polling, in the first three years of the campaign, ASK successfully inspired more than 19 million parents to begin asking if there were guns where their children play. Further, 93% of parents, including those who choose to own guns, said they would be comfortable being asked this question. To create awareness of the message, ASK has partnered with numerous leading national organizations, including education, healthcare, and law enforcement groups.

For more information, please visit www.askingsaveskids.org.
Suicide-Proof Your Home

The Suicide-Proof Your Home Initiative is a comprehensive public information campaign that focuses on suicide prevention by restricting access to lethal means. This approach is based on research by the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, which shows that the method a person uses to attempt suicide plays a key role in whether that person lives or dies. While about 85% of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal, many of the widely used suicide attempt methods, such as overdose and cutting, have fatality rates below 5%. Since 9 out of 10 of those who survive suicide attempts do not ultimately die by suicide, restricting access to lethal means such as firearms, particularly in the home, is crucial to lowering suicide rates and saving lives.

Suicide-Proof Your Home was developed in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health under a Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Suicide-Proof Your Home Initiative offers parents simple steps they can take to keep guns and medicine away from their children. Partnerships with local public health and community organizations help get the message to parents.

The Suicide-Proof Your Home Initiative has proven effective in influencing attitudes and behaviors. In a phone survey conducted after the pilot Suicide-Proof Your Home program, 95% of parents who had heard about the campaign said it was important to suicide-proof their homes. Nearly 50% had already made changes or were considering making changes around the home to make their homes safer.

For more information, please visit www.suicideproof.org.

Towards a Safer Nation

Although gun violence can be a very divisive issue, there is common ground. We can all agree that children shouldn’t die from guns. While many parents appreciate the responsibility that comes with owning a firearm, others do not. Changing social norms can immediately improve the safety of America’s children and lead to long-term shifts in the way Americans think about guns in homes across the country. Education and knowledge of the risks to children are crucial to making this happen. The first step is getting the conversation started on how to keep kids safe.
### APPENDIX

State-level data: percent of adults with household firearms, 2007-2011 youth firearms deaths (0-19), five-year age-adjusted firearm death rates (0-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Any Household, Firearm</th>
<th>2007-2011 Deaths</th>
<th>Five-year Age-Adjusted Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>4.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>Arizona</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>339</td>
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<td>58.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>1938</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>2.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.37</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>3.36</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>514</td>
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<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4.76</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Any Household, Firearm</th>
<th>2007-2011 Deaths</th>
<th>Five-year Age-Adjusted Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
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<td>30.5%</td>
<td>17*</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
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<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>147</td>
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<td>1.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
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<td>Rhode Island</td>
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<td>2.98</td>
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<td>57.9%</td>
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<td>2.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
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<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>14,258</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - State-level rates and counts based on fewer than 10 deaths are suppressed
* Rates based on 20 or fewer deaths may be unstable
ENDNOTES

Summary of Vital Statistics


Summary of Vital Statistics, Part 2


Endnotes for Figures

Figure 1: 2011 gun deaths by intent, ages 0-19

Figure 2: Age-adjusted rates of youth (0-19) firearm-related deaths, 1981-2011

Figure 3: Leading causes of death, ages 1-19

Figure 4: Homicide and suicide by mechanism

Figure 5: Unintentional firearm deaths as a percentage of overall gun deaths, by age

Figure 6: A youth’s risk of being killed by a gun, five-year data

Figure 7: Firearm death rates by intent, race, and sex
Figure 8: Five-year age-adjusted firearm death rate (0-19)

Figure 9: Adults with household firearms (%)

Figure 10: States with highest five-year age-adjusted firearm death rates, 0-19

Figure 11: Crude firearm death rates (0-19) according to rural-urban continuum code

Figure 12: Firearm deaths by age and location

Figure 13: Youth killed in a home, by intent

Figure 14: Selected school shootings from the Safe School Initiative where gun was taken from home
This information was obtained through an investigation by the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence that included an examination of media reports, court documents, and relevant studies.

Figure 15: Selected recent school shootings where gun was taken from home
This information was obtained through an investigation by the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence that included an examination of media reports, court documents, and relevant studies.

Figure 16: Estimated percent of loaded and unlocked household firearms among adults with a child under 18; Estimated number of children (0-17) living with unlocked and loaded firearms

Figure 17: Child knowledge and handling of guns in the home versus parental beliefs

A Note About Data Sources


Youth Gun Deaths & Injuries


2 Estimates show that there are between 270 million and 310 million guns in the United States.


4 Ibid.

5 All rates are age-adjusted except where noted.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


Youth At Risk


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

State-Level Information


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

County Gun Deaths


Where Youth Gun Deaths Occur


3 Ibid.

School Shootings


3 “An incident of targeted school violence was defined as any incident where (i) a current student or former student attacked someone at his or her school with lethal means (e.g., a gun or knife); and, (ii) where the student attacker purposefully chose his or her school as the location of the attack.”

5 “A school-associated violent death event was defined as a firearm-related homicide or suicide in which the homicide perpetrator or the suicide victim was an elementary or secondary school student and the fatal injury occurred during July 1, 1992–June 30, 1999, either 1) on the campus of a functioning public or private elementary or secondary school in the United States, 2) while the victim was on the way to or from regular sessions at such a school, or 3) while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event.”


7 Ibid.


10 Ibid.


12 Ibid.


Household Gun Access & Storage

1 Unsafe access refers to any guns stored outside of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ recommendations on safe firearm storage: “guns unloaded and locked, ammunition locked separately.”


7 Ibid.


Changing Social Norms


Appendix:

